Literariness Journal
A Peer-Reviewed Quarterly Journal of Literature and Cultural Studies

P-ISSN: 3108-1614
E-ISSN: 3108-172X

LiterarinessJournal.org

Vol. 1, Issue. 3 June 2026

A Literariness.org Project

Anatomy of an Erasure: Postmemory and the Embodied Archive in *We Do Not Part*

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Abstract: Han Kang's novel *We Do Not Part* (2025) offers a devastating literary confrontation with the Jeju 4.3 Incident, one of the most violently suppressed chapters in modern South Korean history. This article examines how the novel dismantles decades of state-enforced amnesia by interrogating the physical, ecological, and archival dimensions of unmourned trauma. Drawing upon Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory, Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, and Heonik Kwon's sociological frameworks of "bad death" (*chet duong*), the study demonstrates how historical violence is visceralised. The victims' suppressed history bypasses language to become somatised in the physical agony of the living, functioning as a "phantom limb" of the national body. Furthermore, the article explores how the desecrated, geomantically sacred landscape of Jeju Island transforms into a spectral witness, where snow and barren trees actively preserve the memory of the slaughtered. In response to the state's destruction of official records, the novel champions the domestic counter-archive—specifically the gendered, clandestine preservation of memory—as a vital ethical imperative. Ultimately, by culminating in acts of surrogate mourning and radical hospitality towards wandering spirits, Kang's narrative functions as a literary exorcism, asserting that historical reconciliation requires enduring the pain of remembrance to grant the displaced dead their final rest.

Keywords: *Postmemory, Trauma Theory, Spectrality, Counter-archive, Somatisation*

In the study of state-sanctioned violence and cultural memory, the erasure of atrocity is often enacted with a violence equal to the atrocity itself. For over half a century, the Jeju 4.3 Incident—a series of massacres that decimated the population of South Korea's southernmost island between 1947 and 1954—existed in a mandated historical vacuum. It was a trauma denied a public language, a category of "bad death" forbidden from entering the national mourning rites, and a history violently paved over by the geopolitical imperatives of the Cold War. Han Kang's novel *We Do Not Part* (2025) emerges directly into this void, serving as a profound literary exhumation of a buried past. The novel does not merely recount historical facts; rather, it explores the devastating aftermath of state-enforced amnesia, interrogating how the unspoken weight of tens of thousands of unburied corpses continues to haunt the physical and psychological landscapes of the living (Kang 8). To comprehend the somatic and spectral dimensions of Kang's narrative, it is absolutely essential to establish the historical architecture of the Jeju 4.3 massacres. The trauma inherited by Kang's protagonists, Kyungha and Inseon, cannot be abstracted from the precise geopolitical and military mechanisms that produced it. The violence inflicted upon Jeju Island was not an isolated aberration, but a calculated programme of eradication executed during the nascent stages of the Cold War. As Heonik Kwon astutely observes in his analysis of Cold War violence in postcolonial spheres, the ideological bifurcation of the globe frequently manifested as "vicious domestic armed conflicts and other exceptional forms of organized political violence often with heavy international intervention" (Kwon 31). The Jeju 4.3 Incident stands as one of the earliest and most devastating examples of this paradigm, a crucible in which the trauma of the dead was forcefully transferred into the bodies and ecologies of subsequent generations.

The tragedy of Jeju 4.3 was precipitated by the island's unique geographic and demographic conditions following the liberation of Korea from Japanese imperial rule on 15 August 1945. Located in the East China Sea, Jeju had long been recognised for its strategic maritime importance, and during the twilight of the Second World War, the Japanese military heavily fortified the island, constructing labyrinthine tunnels and bases in the mid-mountainous regions to defend against an anticipated Allied invasion, garrisoning roughly 60,000 troops there (National Committee 67–68). Following the Japanese surrender, Jeju experienced a massive demographic upheaval; approximately 60,000 Jeju citizens who had been conscripted for labour or military service in Japan and other territories returned to the island, swelling the population and straining the already fragile local economy (National Committee 78). This influx of returning citizens coincided with severe commodity shortages, the outbreak of a cholera epidemic in 1946 that disproportionately affected the island, and disastrously poor harvests of staple crops such as barley and millet (National Committee 119–120). In the administrative vacuum left by the Japanese, local islanders established the Jeju People's Committee. Unlike its counterparts on the mainland, which were quickly dismantled by the United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK), the Jeju People's Committee enjoyed widespread popular support and initially

maintained a cooperative, moderate relationship with the US military authorities (National Committee 83–84). The committee was largely composed of individuals who had participated in anti-Japanese resistance movements, lending them significant moral authority among the populace as they focused on maintaining public order, stabilising prices, and providing public education (National Committee 84–90).

However, as Cold War anxieties hardened, the USAMGIK increasingly viewed the independent, left-leaning tendencies of the Jeju populace with deep suspicion, a geopolitical tension that reached a boiling point when the USAMGIK elevated Jeju to the status of an independent province on 1 August 1946 (National Committee 97). This bureaucratic manoeuvre drastically expanded the presence of right-wing mainland police forces and the Korean Constabulary on the island, directly threatening the autonomy of the local committees and inciting public resentment over increased taxation and the influx of foreign personnel (National Committee 98–101). The fracture between the Jeju populace and the state authorities irreparably ruptured on 1 March 1947, during ceremonies marking the 28th anniversary of the Korean Independence Movement. In Jeju-eup, a crowd of approximately 25,000 to 30,000 citizens gathered for an authorised assembly; however, following the assembly, an unpermitted parade commenced, devolving into chaos when a mounted policeman accidentally struck a young child with his horse and attempted to flee (National Committee 130–132). The crowd chased the officer toward the police station, and mainland police reserves, misinterpreting the crowd's anger as a coordinated attack, opened fire into the unarmed civilians. *The Jeju 4.3 Incident Investigation Report* explicitly condemns this disproportionate use of force, noting that the victims were shot in the back while standing a considerable distance from the station (National Committee 133). Six civilians were killed, and instead of appeasing the outraged public, the authorities justified the shooting as self-defence and initiated widespread arrests (National Committee 133–136). In response, an unprecedented island-wide general strike commenced on 10 March 1947, which the right-wing central government in Seoul viewed not as a plea for civil justice, but as an organised communist insurrection (National Committee 139–142). The state flooded the island with mainland police forces and extreme right-wing paramilitary groups, such as the Seobuk Young Men's Association, who operated with terrifying impunity (National Committee 117). Driven to desperation, left-wing militants launched a coordinated armed uprising on the morning of 3 April 1948 (National Committee 213). The state's response escalated from targeted military suppression into a campaign of indiscriminate mass slaughter; following the establishment of the Republic of Korea under President Rhee Syng-man, the government declared martial law on Jeju Island in November 1948 and implemented a scorched-earth policy (*ch'ot'ohwa*) designed to sever any possible link between the civilian population and the guerrillas (National Committee 347).

The sheer scale of the devastation wrought by these military operations fundamentally desecrated the island's geomantic order, transforming a landscape of spiritual vitality into a sprawling, unhallowed necropolis. Before its desecration, Jeju Island was historically revered as a site of profound mystical and geomantic significance. At the centre of this spiritual topography lies Hallasan, a dormant volcano that dominates the island's geography. David J. Nemeth, in his spatial analysis of Jeju's traditional landscapes, outlines how the island was conceptualised not merely as a physical landmass, but as an active, breathing cosmological entity, noting that tradition-bound locals visualise Hallasan "as a conduit for heaven's breath" (Nemeth 5). Under traditional *p'ungsu* [feng-shui] principles, the harmonious relationship between the living, the dead, and the natural environment was paramount. Yet, the military strategy deliberately targeted these remote, sacred mid-mountainous zones, leading to the eradication of entire communities where men, women, children, and the elderly were herded into fields, schoolyards, and beaches, and shot en masse (National Committee 360–368). Because these massacres occurred swiftly and ruthlessly, tens of thousands of victims were left unburied in the wilderness, deprived of customary funeral rites. In the framework of Vietnamese mourning practices documented by Heonik Kwon, such violent, unappropriated deaths are termed *chet duong* ["death in the street"], which produces wandering ghosts who are forcibly uprooted from the genealogical order and unable to return to their ancestral shrines (Kwon 86). Kwon explains that a sudden, violent death in a distant and unknown place collapses the possibility of ritual appropriation, leading to a condition of confusion and disorder without the means for resolving them (Kwon 86).

The victims of the Jeju 4.3 massacres were entirely relegated to this realm of *chet duong*. In *We Do Not Part*, the natural environment itself has absorbed the confusion and disorder of these unappropriated deaths; the landscape does not merely contain ghosts, the landscape *is* the ghost. In traditional literary tropes, snow is frequently deployed as a symbol of purity, silence, or a peaceful erasure of the past, but in Kang's poetics, snow operates as a chilling preserver of trauma. It is a hostile, spectral substance that freezes the agony of the massacres in a state of perpetual suspension. This ecological haunting is established in the novel's opening pages through Kyungha's recurring dream, where she finds herself in a desolate landscape of black, severed tree trunks:

> I stood on flat land that edged up a low hill. Along the brow of this hill and down its visible face to the seam of the plain, thousands of black tree trunks jutted from the earth. They varied in height, like a crowd of people ranging in age, and were about as thick as railway sleepers, though nowhere near as straight. Stooped and listing, they gave the impression of a thousand men, women, and haggard children huddling in the snow. (Kang 8)

The black, severed trees are explicitly anthropomorphised as the unburied victims of Jeju 4.3, standing frozen in the blizzard, covered in snow that resembles "salt crystals"—an element used to preserve dead flesh (Kang 8). This haunting imagery is rooted in the historical testimony of the survivors. Inseon recounts her mother's memory of searching for the bodies of her family members following a massacre, where the snow, rather than covering the brutality, locked the victims in a state of suspended agony:

> They looked over the bodies that had fallen every which way on top of one another and found that, overnight, a thin layer of snow had covered and frozen upon each face. They couldn't tell anyone apart because of the snow, and since my aunt couldn't bring herself to brush it away with her bare hands, she used a handkerchief to wipe each face clean. I'll wipe them, she told my mom, and you get a good look at them... That day, she came to understand something clearly. That when people died, their bodies went cold. Snow remained on their cheeks, and a thin layer of bloody ice set over their faces. (Kang 24)

The thin layer of bloody ice represents the ecological encapsulation of *chet duong*. Because the bodies were not retrieved and given proper burial rites, the snow functions as a temporal freezer, trapping the event in a continuous, unchanging present. When Kyungha travels to Jeju Island decades later, the blizzard she walks through is a manifestation of the island's unresolved history; the snowflakes have deliberate, heavy agency, acting as a physical barrier that she must forcefully penetrate (Kang 31). The boundary between the meteorological and the spectral dissolves entirely as the landscape wails with the voices of the unappeased dead. As Kyungha treks through the dark, snow-covered cryptomeria woods toward Inseon's home, the woods shudder and cry out, and the tall trees lurch in the gloaming, vividly bringing the black trees of her dream into reality (Kang 42).

This ecological haunting is inextricably bound to the somatisation of historical trauma within the physical bodies of the survivors and their descendants. When the apparatus of the state systematically forecloses the possibility of public mourning, trauma does not dissipate; it seeks subterranean channels of expression. Following the massacres, the South Korean government implemented a draconian architecture of silence, maintained through the Anti-Communist Law and a guilt-by-association system that branded surviving relatives as subversives, barring them from civic participation (National Committee 40–41, 607). To publicly mourn a victim was to invite state surveillance, torture, and socioeconomic ruin. This institutionalised silencing forced the trauma of Jeju 4.3 into the domestic sphere, forging what Marianne Hirsch defines as "postmemory"—the relationship that the generation after bears to the collective trauma of those who preceded them, remembered only through stories, images, and traumatic behaviours. In Kang's narrative, postmemory is not merely a psychological

inheritance; it is a biological haunting. Cathy Caruth's trauma theory posits that trauma is an "unclaimed experience" that returns repeatedly to possess the survivor. For Kyungha, this unclaimed experience possesses her body, manifesting as visceral, uncontrollable physical breakdowns following the publication of her book on a separate historical massacre. Her body violently rejects the present because it is anchored in the unresolved past, leaving her bed-bound, subsisting on water and small quantities of rice, and plagued by migraines and abdominal spasms (Kang 10). The terror of the state's historical violence pins Kyungha down, mirroring the helplessness of the victims who were systematically hunted. Her physical symptoms are the somatic manifestations of the historical weight she carries:

> I don't know what set it off, the shaking. My body seemed to be racked by sobs, though my eyes remained dry. Was this terror? Or anxiety, agitation, perhaps an abrupt anguish? No, it was a bone-chilling awareness. That a giant, invisible knife —the weight of its heavy blade beyond any human capacity to wield it—hung in the air, with me as its target. As I lay pinned and staring. (Kang 9)

Yet, it is through the character of Inseon that the text most brutally allegorises the ethics of historical remembrance. After accidentally severing two fingers on her dominant hand, Inseon is subjected to a horrific recovery regimen to prevent the reattached nerves from necrotising. A carer must plunge a needle into the raw, bloodied sutures of her fingertips every three minutes, around the clock, inducing excruciating pain (Kang 14). The medical necessity of this procedure operates as a devastating metaphor for the moral necessity of maintaining historical memory:

> We have to make sure scabs don't form on the wound, Inseon went on. They said we have to let the blood flow, that I have to feel the pain. Otherwise the nerves below the cut will die. And what happens if they die? I asked numbly. Inseon brightened suddenly and I almost found myself smiling back at her beaming, childlike face. They'll rot, of course. The reattached tips. (Kang 15)

In Kang's somatised framework, to allow the "scabs" of historical amnesia to form over the Jeju 4.3 massacres is to allow the truth of the victims to rot in obscurity. The relentless needle pricks represent the painful, continuous effort required to keep the memory of the dead alive. This embodied trauma aligns with Heonik Kwon's sociological concept of the "phantom limb." Kwon utilises Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology to explore how an amputee avows two contradictory realities simultaneously: the historical reality of a living limb and the given reality of its absence, transforming the absent limb into a living, embodied memory (Kwon 79). Kwon extends this to the social body, arguing that an amputated part of a community maintains the historical reality of the living whole, and

that the entire loss of a family is seldom reducible to either side of the bipolar political structure (Kwon 79–80). Inseon's severed fingers function precisely as this phantom limb of Korean history, a continuous reminder of the lives excised from the national body. While enduring the torture of the needles, Inseon uses her agony as a conduit, connecting her across time to the victims of state violence, explicitly comparing her pain to those who were "hit with bullets, hit with cudgels, lives severed by blades" (Kang 20). By localising the terror of those deaths within her own acute pain, Inseon resists the sterilising, bureaucratic language of the state's historical erasure.

This resistance inevitably leads to a confrontation with the archive. As Jacques Derrida posits in *Archive Fever*, the concept of the archive is intrinsically tied to political authority; the state dictates what is preserved and what is relegated to oblivion. The South Korean government maintained its monopoly on historical memory by actively destroying police records and suppressing testimonies (National Committee 39, 55–56). In the absence of a public archive, the preservation of truth is forced into the domestic, subterranean sphere. Cultural memory theorist Aleida Assmann differentiates between the "canon" (state-sanctioned memory) and the "archive" [marginalised memory]. In Kang's novel, the true history of Jeju 4.3 survives only within the fragile, clandestine domestic archives curated by women. Inseon's mother meticulously preserves a secret repository of evidence regarding her missing brother, concealed within the lining of a dark-red silk sewing box (Kang 48). Kang illustrates the delicate, precarious nature of this alternative archive:

> I found this in the sewing box, Inseon says, placing the letter back in its silk wrapping. My mom had sewn it into the lining of the lid. If she hadn't told me to get it for her, I'd never have found it... Inseon slips her hands inside the box that had stored the brittle clippings. It seems she is able to find what she needs by touch alone, because in no time she is handing me a sheaf of papers that have been stapled together. A stack of A4 sheets that feel smooth to the touch, perhaps from their fluorescent coating, and that seem to have bypassed time. (Kang 48)

The sewing box serves as a potent metaphor for the gendered dimensions of memory-keeping under totalitarian suppression. While the patriarchal state destroys official records, the mother's archive is painstakingly stitched into the fabric of her daily domestic life. Inseon's own career as an avant-garde documentary filmmaker operates as an extension of this counter-archival impulse, capturing the silence and shadows of survivors rather than producing straightforward historical narratives (Kang 14). Her films consist of smudges of light over a limewashed wall in shadow, refusing to offer a false sense of closure and insisting on the opacity of trauma (Kang 14).

The preservation of the archive and the endurance of somatised trauma ultimately demand a transition toward active mourning. Because the state denied the victims of Jeju 4.3 the dignity of traditional funerary rites, the protagonists must invent surrogate rituals to appease the wandering spirits. When Kyungha discovers that Inseon's pet bird, Ama, has died from the cold, she engages in a meticulous, physically exhausting process of mourning and burial. She sources a pristine white handkerchief embroidered with violets, a biscuit tin, and cotton thread from the very room that houses the suppressed archive (Kang 42). This tender preparation of the bird's body, folding the handkerchief over its half-open wings and securing it with cotton thread, stands in stark contrast to the violent disposal of the human victims of 1948 (Kang 43). Kyungha braves the blizzard to dig a proper grave beneath a tree, restoring order to the landscape and demonstrating that the cycle of trauma can only be broken through active acts of care (Kang 45).

This radical hospitality extends to the ghosts themselves. Heonik Kwon's research on postwar Vietnam reveals a "two-way" commemorative practice wherein villagers offer prayers and sustenance not only to their own ancestors but also to unrelated, wandering ghosts (Kwon 86–87). Through acts of hospitality, the moral identity of ghosts can transform from dangerous outsiders into powerful kindred spirits, as their grievous experience in displacement develops into a radical devotion to their adoptive home (Kwon 103–104). When Kyungha returns to the house after the burial, the boundary between the living and the dead collapses entirely. The spirit of Inseon appears beside her, and the shadow of the deceased bird, Ami, takes flight against the wall (Kang 48). Kyungha and Inseon exhibit radical hospitality; they share their space with the ghosts, offering the warmth of a candle and brewing broadleaf bamboo tea. By welcoming the displaced dead into the domestic sphere—turning her head toward Inseon's startlingly clear voice as she notes that "He doesn't always come, but it seems he did today" (Kang 49)—Kang suggests that the historical trauma of Jeju cannot be exorcised through forgetting or state suppression. The "bad deaths" of the past will only find peace when the living are willing to endure the pain of remembering, to excavate the clandestine archives, and to offer the ghosts a place at the table. *We Do Not Part* stands as a masterwork of postmemory, a testament to the indestructible nature of truth, and a hauntingly beautiful plea for historical reconciliation, proving that while the state may destroy physical bodies and official records, it cannot entirely eradicate the demanding presence of the spectral archive.

While the spectral archive establishes a permanent metaphysical resistance against state amnesia, the physical mechanisms of this resistance in *We Do Not Part* are profoundly gendered, relying on the clandestine, highly intimate labour of women. The South Korean state's monopoly on memory was enforced through a patriarchal, militarised architecture that explicitly criminalised public grief, heavily monitoring any civic attempts to locate or commemorate the dead (National Committee 40). In the

absence of a public forum, the preservation of truth was forced into the subterranean, domestic sphere. It is highly significant that Inseon's mother does not hide her archive in a traditional library or a safe, but rather sews it into the lining of a dark-red silk sewing box (Kang 48). This object, traditionally associated with feminine domestic labour, is subversively repurposed into a vault of political truth. The very act of sewing the archive into the lining requires a painstaking, tactile engagement with the trauma; she is literally stitching the suppressed history of the nation into the fabric of her daily life. The archive she protects contains brittle newspaper clippings and letters regarding the Daegu Penitentiary transfers and the Gyeongsan Cobalt Mine massacres (Kang 48). These locations represent the secondary, hidden horrors of the Jeju 4.3 Incident. Following the initial scorched-earth campaigns on the island, thousands of Jeju citizens were subjected to illegal courts-martial and transported to mainland prisons, only to be summarily executed and dumped into abandoned mines at the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 (National Committee 541–572). Because the state completely obfuscated the records of these mainland executions, the mother's hidden clippings serve as the only connective tissue linking her missing brother to his ultimate fate. By maintaining this archive, she engages in what memory scholars identify as the crucial work of postmemory—ensuring that the generational transfer of trauma is accompanied by the transfer of irrefutable evidence. Her refusal to surrender to the state's mandated forgetting transforms the sewing box into an anti-monument, a private repository that holds more historical truth than the towering, sterilised memorials erected by the government.

This gendered imperative to document and mourn extends directly to Inseon, whose career as an avant-garde documentary filmmaker operates as an evolution of her mother's archival impulse. However, Inseon's cinematic approach actively problematises the nature of documentary representation, questioning how one can visually capture a history defined almost entirely by its erasure. When Inseon attempts to turn the camera upon the trauma of Jeju and her own family's haunting, traditional narrative structures entirely collapse. Rather than producing a straightforward, consumable historical narrative—which often provides audiences with a false, cathartic sense of closure—she creates a triptych that eschews direct exposition. The text describes her film as consisting of shadows, knees, and hands, where a woman is visible only as a faint figure sitting in darkness, slowly piecing her words together (Kang 14). The film relies on drawn-out pauses and smudges of light over a limewashed wall in shadow, leaving audiences perplexed and disappointed (Kang 14). This public disappointment highlights a critical tension in the consumption of trauma. The public often demands that trauma be neatly packaged into a linear story with a clear beginning, middle, and resolution. But the trauma of Jeju 4.3—a trauma of missing bodies, silenced victims, and unpunished perpetrators—fundamentally defies such neat categorisation. By presenting only "smudges of light" and "drawn out pauses," Inseon's film insists on the opacity of the archive (Kang 14). Her avant-garde aesthetics perfectly mirror the fragmented, half-buried nature of the Jeju massacres themselves. The shadow cast against

the limewashed wall acts as a visual manifestation of the ghosts that Heonik Kwon identifies as central to the post-conflict landscape—beings that are neither fully present nor entirely absent, demanding acknowledgement without offering easy consolation (Kwon 16). Through Inseon's cinematic choices, Kang argues that true ethical testimony does not consist of making the past easily digestible, but rather of forcing the witness to sit uncomfortably within the silences, the gaps, and the shadows of history.

This discomfort is not merely visual or intellectual; it is deeply ecological, demanding a spatial reckoning with the island itself. To fully unpack Kang's ecological poetics, the landscape of Jeju must be understood through a dual lens: first, the traditional, sacred geomancy (*p'ungsu*) that governed the island's spiritual topography prior to 1948, and second, the profound cosmological rupture inflicted by the state's scorched-earth military campaigns. Before its desecration, Jeju Island was historically revered as a site of profound mystical significance, heavily populated by stone megaliths and guardian statues known as *dolharubang* (stone grandfathers) which served as mnemonic architecture to protect the boundaries of human sanctuaries (Nemeth 14–17). David J. Nemeth's spatial analysis outlines how the island was conceptualised not merely as a physical landmass, but as an active cosmological entity, where the harmonious relationship between the living, the dead, and the natural environment was strictly maintained through carefully aligned ancestral tombs and village guards (Nemeth 27–29). However, the military suppression of 1948 violently inverted this sacred topography. The *Jeju 4.3 Incident Investigation Report* notes that the state's pacification strategy deliberately targeted these remote, sacred areas, leading to the devastation of mid-mountainous villages where entire communities were driven into the hills and slaughtered without the protection of their traditional guardian stones (National Committee 360–368). The military strategy fundamentally desecrated the island's geomantic order, transforming a landscape of spiritual vitality into a sprawling, unhallowed necropolis. The sheer scale of the massacres, coupled with the immediate prohibition on mourning, meant that tens of thousands of victims were left unburied in the wilderness. In the sociology of East Asian mortuary practices, the location and manner of death are inextricably linked to the metaphysical fate of the soul. Heonik Kwon articulates a strict cultural dichotomy between *chet nha* ["death at home"] and *chet duong* ["death in the street"]; while a good death occurs within the home surrounded by kindred who can ritually appropriate the deceased into a benevolent ancestor, a bad death is a sudden, violent death in a distant and unknown place that collapses the possibility of ritual appropriation, leading to a condition of confusion and disorder (Kwon 86). Victims of *chet duong* are transformed into *co bac* (wandering ghosts)—ontological refugees who are uprooted from their homes and forced to wander the margins of the living world, unable to settle into the afterlife (Kwon 16).

The victims of the Jeju 4.3 massacres were entirely relegated to the realm of *chet duong*. Slaughtered in the snow, in schoolyards, and in forests, they were abruptly excised from the "society of ancestors." Kang's novel is saturated with these ontological refugees, and the natural environment itself has absorbed the confusion and disorder of these unappropriated deaths. As Kyungha wades deeper into the isolated mid-mountainous regions—the very zones designated for extermination in 1948—the environment begins to mimic the cries of the slaughtered. The wind and the trees are heavily personified, possessing an animistic vitality that confronts the living. Kwon notes that in East Asian mortuary beliefs, the spirits of those who suffered violent deaths do not seek vengeance so much as they seek historical visibility, demanding that someone know what they went through (Kwon 54). In the absence of a willing human audience due to the state's prohibition on mourning, the Jeju landscape itself has adopted the burden of remembering. As Kyungha treks through the dark, snow-covered cryptomeria woods toward Inseon's home, the boundary between the meteorological and the spectral entirely dissolves. The landscape wails with the voices of the unappeased dead: "The woods shudder and cry out. Snow topples from trees in great flurries. My forehead feels like it's about to shatter... The single-lane road winds through the dense forest of cryptomeria. Thousands of tall trees lurch in the gloaming under scattering snow. As if the black trees of my old dream were alive still, and this was their landscape" (Kang 42). The shuddering and crying of the woods articulate the trauma that the human survivors were legally forbidden to express. By entering this landscape, Kyungha is stepping into a physical archive of state violence. The environment actively assaults her senses—the cold freezes her eyelashes, the wind deafens her—forcing her to physically engage with the discomfort and terror of the dead (Kang 42). Kang suggests that the ecology of Jeju cannot be pacified or separated from its history; the blood of the massacres has seeped into the water table, and the final breaths of the victims have become the wind.

This environmental haunting ultimately forces the protagonists to transition from passive endurance to active, surrogate mourning. Because the state denied the victims of Jeju 4.3 the dignity of traditional funerary rites, the living must invent surrogate rituals to appease the wandering spirits. When Kyungha discovers that Inseon's pet bird, Ama, has died from the cold, she engages in a meticulous, physically exhausting process of mourning and burial (Kang 42). Rather than discarding the fragile body, she sources a pristine white handkerchief embroidered with violets, a biscuit tin, and cotton thread, performing a surrogate funerary rite with painstaking precision: "As I wrap the bird in the embroidered handkerchief, I can feel its cold delicate body through the thin material of the fabric. I gently tuck in the bird's half-open wings, fold the handkerchief once more over its body, then lay it in the tin... I wind a length of cotton thread round the handkerchief to secure it and snip the end with the sewing scissors" (Kang 42–43). This tender, deliberate preparation of the bird's body stands in stark, heartbreaking contrast to the careless, violent disposal of the human victims of 1948. By investing such immense

physical and emotional labour into the burial of a twenty-gram bird—braving the blizzard to use her entire body weight to break through the frozen earth and dig a proper grave beneath a tree—Kyungha is performing a proxy ritual for the tens of thousands of islanders who were denied the same dignity (Kang 45). The act of smoothing the black earth and packing the soil into a neat mound restores a microcosm of geomantic order to the desecrated landscape (Kang 45). Through this surrogate mourning, the narrative insists that the cycle of trauma can only be broken through active, laborious acts of care.

This surrogate mourning extends beyond the physical handling of the deceased bird; it establishes the foundation for a broader, radical hospitality directed towards the spectral entities themselves. In the sociology of East Asian mortuary practices, the wandering ghosts of "bad deaths" (*chet duong*) are frequently viewed as dangerous, malignant forces that threaten the living, precisely because their sudden and violent displacement from the genealogical order leaves them in a state of cosmological disorder. However, Heonik Kwon's research on postwar trauma reveals a more nuanced, democratic approach to the displaced dead that is highly relevant to Kang's narrative. Kwon observes a "two-way" commemorative practice wherein villagers offer prayers and sustenance not only to their own ancestors inside the home but also to the unrelated, wandering ghosts outside (Kwon 86–87). Crucially, Kwon argues that through these acts of hospitality, the moral identity of ghosts can undergo a profound transformation. They are not permanently condemned to wander the margins as hostile spectres:

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